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GUEST EDITORIAL: SEA TURTLE DECOYS -- COULD THEY BE USED TO ESTABLISH NESTING COLONIES?

Alper (1991) described successful use of puffin (Fratercula arctica) decoys to attract real puffins to islands in outer Penobscot Bay east of Portland, Maine, thus expanding the bird's range beyond the few colonies in Newfoundland to which the species had been driven by turn-of-the-century hunters. Years ago, Dow Chemical Company used plastic decoys to re-establish a nesting colony of black skimmers (Rynchops niger) on the site of Dow's plant in Freeport, Texas. Royal tern (Sterna maxima) decoys made by Dow also were used to establish nesting colonies of this species on islands created with U. S. Army Corps of Engineers dredge material deposits in coastal areas of Texas.

Perhaps such an approach would work for sea turtles such as Kemp's ridley (Lepidochelys kempii) which naturally congregate and nest in concentrations referred to as "arribadas." Use of decoys to attract turtles to a particular nesting location presupposes that their normal migratory routes would bring them in contact with such decoys. One unproven theory of nesting site selection by sea turtles is "social facilitation" (Owens et al. 1982), whereby sea turtles that have never nested come in contact with and follow previous nesters to a nesting beach. Historically, commercial turtlers have used floating decoys to attract sea turtles to sites where nets were set to catch them. Sea turtles in the eastern tropical Pacific have been observed more frequently associated with man-made than with natural floating objects (Arenas and Hall 1992).

Plotkin et al. (1992) concluded that social facilitation does not appear to be the mechanism by which olive ridley (L. olivacea) locates a nesting site. However, low levels of migration to sites other than the natal beach may be essential to the founding of new colonies of green turtles (Chelonia mydas) in a changing environment (Carr 1967; Allard et al. 1994). Recently, "errors" in homing by adult female Kemp's ridleys have been documented by cases in which they nested in Florida and the Carolinas (Meylan et al. 1990; Anonymous 1992).

Large, floating sea turtle decoys might attract adult turtles during spring migrations and concentrate them off beaches chosen for establishment of nesting colonies. Additional decoys of "crawling" or "nesting" turtles placed on these beaches also might be further attractants. Obviously, many biological and conservation considerations should be addressed before a test of this approach is made, but it could prove useful in increasing the number of nesting sites or in building nesting colonies at sites of sporadic nesting.

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RECOVERY PLAN FOR U. S. POPULATION OF HAWKSBILL SEA TURTLE

Recovery Plans for U. S. populations of sea turtles in U. S. Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean waters are available to the public. Published plans describe recovery criteria for the green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), Kemp's ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*), leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*) [see MTN 63:17-20], loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*) [see MTN 66:19-20] and, finally, for the hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*). Copies may be purchased from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Reference Service, 5430 Grosvenor Lane, Suite 110, Bethesda, Maryland 20814 USA; Tel: (301) 492-6403. KLE/SAE.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

National Marine Fisheries Service and U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1993. Recovery Plan for Hawksbill Turtles in the U. S. Caribbean Sea, Atlantic Ocean, and Gulf of Mexico. National Marine Fisheries Service, St. Petersburg, Florida. 52 p.

Current status: The hawksbill is listed as an endangered species throughout the world. The most important nesting beaches within United States jurisdiction in the Caribbean Sea are on Mona Island, Puerto Rico, and Buck Island Reef National Monument (BIRNM), St. Croix, U. S. Virgin Islands. Coastal development threatens nesting habitat. Illegal slaughter is a threat in Puerto Rico as well as in neighboring countries. International trade in hawksbill products threatens populations all over the world.